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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the results of a study that investigated whether there are any significant differences in political leadership potential and willingness to lead among three groups of Singapore students from the Gifted Education Program (GEP) (n=86), the best Express Stream class (n=74), and the weakest Express Stream class (n=61). Data were collected through the use of a self-constructed questionnaire that measured potential for leadership, willingness to lead, expectations of national leaders, influence of parents, and influence of school. The findings of the study show that there were no significant differences in willingness to lead when the respondents were compared by educational stream or by sex. However, in terms of leadership potential, a significant difference was found to exist between males and females, with females showing a lead over the males. In conclusion, there was no significant difference between the streams, showing that the GEP students did not have higher leadership potential than their Express Stream counterparts. (Author/CR)

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF BRIGHT ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO LEAD

Agnes Chang and Geraldine Loh

The study was undertaken within the context of Singapore's need for renewed political leadership. The main objective of the study was to find out if there were any significant differences in political leadership potential and willingness to lead amongst students from the Gifted Education Programme and those from the Express Stream. Differences between the males and females were also considered.

The subjects for the study were students from two premier schools with the Gifted Education Programme. The sample consisted of 221 students from three different groups : the GEP, Best Express Class and " Weakest " Express Class. Data were collected through the use of a self-constructed questionnaire that measured Potential for Leadership, Willingness to Lead, Expectations of National Leaders, Influence of Parents and Influence of School.

The findings of the study show that there were no significant differences in willingness to lead when the respondents were compared by stream or by sex. However, in terms of leadership potential, a significant difference was found to exist between males and females, with females showing a lead over the males. But there was no significant difference between the streams, showing that the GEP students did not have higher leadership potential than their Express Stream counterparts.

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POLITICAL LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF BRIGHT ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO LEAD

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INTRODUCTION

The study was undertaken within the context of Singapore's need for renewed politicai leadership. The main objective of the study was to find out if there were any significant differences in political leadership potential and willingness to lead amongst students from the Gifted Education Programme and those from the Express Stream. Differences between males and females were also considered. Sources of influence on students' protential and willingness to lead were also examined.

> "What are the qualities of leadership? Integrity, drive, verve, intelligence, physical and mental discipline. And yet, no Rhode's Scholar has ever become Prime Minister or the President of any of the English-speaking countries of the world. What is it then? This is the problem with Asia."
>
> (Lee Kuan Yew, 1967)

Mr Lee Kuan Yew expressed disappointment that no Rhode's Scholar selected on the basis of good leadership qualities had yet made a significant contribution to political leadership. He pointed to an elusive component of character that we had not successfully identified and called it "*will*". Loh maintains that this "*will*" may be a combination of motivation, perseverance and willingness to lead.

In his last National Day Rally Speech in 1990, Mr Lee Kuan Yew stressed that there was the need to get Singapore's ablest and best into politics. Prior to any change in leadership, the pressing need for renewed leadership became more evident. However, Kuo (1988) found Singapore's Youth to be career minded with many wanting to migrate. There was also a distinct "*lack of enthusiasm*" and a "*blase attitute*" towards the future. Similarly Chang (1993) found that the students from the Gifted Education Programme preferred to serve the country as professionals and in community service but were not keen to take up political leadership.

Given the sensitive regional political climate and the pressing needs of Singapore, a constant flow of new generation leaders with top qualities will be needed to fill the seats of the country's future political leadership. Yet, the problem of identifying top people and persuading them to take an active role in the political varena still remains.

It is gratifying that the PAP Party is able to field 24 new candidates for the coming election. Of the 24 new faces, two of them are women. In an article entitles "**About that missing half in Singapore Politics.....**", NMP, Kanwaljit Soin (BT, Dec 30-31, '95, pg II) explored the issue on Singapore's lack of women politicians. In Singapore, it is a problem getting woman to join politics as they carefully examine the cost to their career and family life. At present, we have two elected women MPs and two women NMPs in Parliament.

Methodology

In this study, the responses of two streams of bright students, GEP and Express, were considered. They were students of two premier schools with the Gifted Education Programme.

The sample consisted of 221 students from three different groups, the GEP, best Express class and weakest Express class.

Table 1: Distribution of sample in study

Stream / Sex	GEP	Express 1 (Best)	Express 2 (Weakest)	Total
Male	53	36	32	121
Female	33	38	29	100
			total	221

Data were collected through the use of a self-constructed questionnaire that measured the following.

A. Potential for leadership
B. Willingness to lead
C. Expectation of national leaders
D. Influence of parents
E. Influence of school

Under the subscale on Potential for Leadership, the following 14 characteristics were considered:

1. Social Participation
2. Assertiveness/Self-confidence
3. Verbal Facility
4. Future Planning
5. Perserverence
6. Achievement
7. Initiative
8. Physical vigour
9. Creativity
10. Discernment
11. Responsibility
12. Adaptability
13. Problem-solving
14. Self-control

Data Analysis

The level of significance accepted in the study was $p \leq 0.01$.

Analysis of Mean Scores

Table 2: Comparison of Mean Scores of Respondents by Sex

	Male N = 121 (SD)	Female N = 100 (SD)
Potential	293.07 (22.31)	304.78 (27.41)
Willingness to lead	46.59 (6.84)	45.97 (8.7)
Expectations of National Leaders	39.55 (4.11)	41.69 (3.4)
Parental Influence	32.28 (6.04)	34.46 (7.0)
School Influence	36.39 (5.84)	37.63 (5.42)
Birth Order	1.69 (0.96)	1.63 (1.0)
Present Leadership Role	1.19 (1.25)	1.57 (1.49)

From Table 2, we can see that females scored higher on potential (x = 304.78) compared to their male counterparts (x = 293.07). However, they scored lower on willingness to take on leadership roles (females x = 45.97, males x = 46.59). The literature on female underachievement could well explain this.

Females also tended to have higher expectation of national leaders (famale x = 41.69, male x = 39.55). They also seemed more influenced by parents and school and also took on more leadership roles when compared to their male counterparts (female x = 1.57, male x = 1.19).

Table 3: Comparison of Mean Scores of Respondents by Stream

	GEP N = 86 (SD)	Exp 1 N = 74 (SD)	Exp 2 N = 61 (SD)
Potential	297.92 (23.18)	298.46 (28.65)	298.89 (24.48)
Willingness to lead	45.52 (7.7)	46.11 (1.82)	47.66 (7.59)
Expectations of National Leaders	40.76 (4.04)	40.11 (4.01)	40.67 (3.74)
Parental Influence	32.16 (6.67)	34.03 (5.92)	33.9 (7.01)
School Influence	36.26 (5.84)	36.91 (5.9)	37.98 (4.11)
Birth Order	1.69 (0.96)	1.8 (1.09)	1.61 (1.07)
Present Leadership Role	1.54 (1.25)	1.39 (1.4)	1.08 (1.33)

From Table 3, we can see that students from the weaker express stream (Exp 2) scored the highest in terms of potential and willingness to lead. Those from the Gifted Education Programme, however, scored the lowest for potential and willingness to lead. This may due to the nature of the personality of the gifted. All three groups score within the same range in terms of expectation of national leaders (range 40.11 to 40.76)

In terms of parental and school influence, students in the Gifted Education Programme turned in the lowest scores ($x = 32.16$ and $x = 36.36$ respectively). However, they were also the group that was most involved in leadership acitivity to date ($x = 1.54$) even though they scored lowest on willingness lead. Herein lies a discrepancy that warrants more attention.

Table 4 insert here

Table 4 shows the breakdown of scores for each group in the sample. By comparing the scores of each group, certain observations may be made.

Potential

Females from the better Express stream classes scored highest on potential, followed by those in the GEP and then the Express 2 group.

Table 4: Comparison of Mean Scores of Each Group in the Sample

Factor (Max Score)	Male GEP (N=53)	Male Express 1 (N=36)	Male Express 2 (N=32)	Female GEP (N=33)	Female Express 1 (N=38)	Female Express 2 (M=29)	Combines (N=221)
	----------	Range 235 to 347	----------	----------	Range 233 to 363	----------	
Potential (Total = 425)	293.91	288.47	296.84	304.36	307.92	301.14	298.37
	----------	Range 27 to 62	----------	----------	Range 24 to 67	----------	
Willingness (Total = 70)	46.02	46.91	47.16	44.73	45.34	48.21	46.31
	----------	Range 25 to 45	----------	----------	Range 30 to 45	----------	
Expectations of National Leaders (Total=45)	39.75	38.61	40.25	42.36	41.53	41.14	40.52
	----------	Range 14 to 50	----------	----------	Range 17 to 50	----------	
Parental Influences (Total =50)	31.32	33.86	32.09	33.52	34.18	35.9	33.27
	----------	Range 13 to 50	----------	----------	Range 24 to 50	----------	
School Influences (Total = 50)	35.00	36.58	38.47	38.27	37.21	37.45	36.95
	----------	Range 1 to 5	----------	----------	Range 0 to 5	----------	
Birth Order (Total = 5)	1.62	1.91	1.53	1.52	1.68	1.69	1.66
	----------	Range 0 to 5	----------	----------	Range 0 to 4	----------	
Present Leadership (Total =5)	1.30	1.33	0.84	1.91	1.45	1.35	1.36

However, it is the males from the low-achieving Express group who scored highest on potential amongst the males, followed by males from the GEP.

In both cases, the GEP group ranked second in scores on potential. When the scores of the males and females were compared, the highest score comes from the females Express 1 group (x = 307.92) followed by the female GEP group (x = 304.36) and the female Express 2 (x = 301.14). This shows clearly that the females have a higher potential for leadership than males.

Willingness to Lead

Of the six groups, females in the Express 2 group expressed the most willingness to take on future leadership roles (x = 48.21).

Even though the female Express 1 group scored highest on potential, they did not match up in their willingness to lead (x = 45.34). The least willing to take on leadership roles was the female GEP group. The males scored relatively higher on willingness to lead (range x = 46.02 to 47.16). This indicates that with the exception of the famale Express 2 group, the females had more potential than the males, but were not as willing to lead as their male counterparts.

This has several implications on the future leadership of Singapore and the possibility of females underachievement in this area.

The GEP groups scored the lowest on willingness to lead for both the male and female groups. However, in both cases, they did not score the lowest on potential. This may indicate that GEP students tended to shy away from leadership roles. However, in the case of GEP females, they were the least willing to lead amongst the whole sample, but had the highest incidence of leadership roles held in school (x =1.91). This "*discrepancy*" may indicate that there is more than meets the eye in the case of the gifted females.

Expectation of National Leaders

The female GEP group had the highest expectations of national leaders (x = 42.36) and females as a whole had higher expectations of national leaders than males.

Parental Influence

The female Express 2 group scored highest on parental influence (x = 35.9). It is interesting to note that this same group also scored the highest on willingness to lead. This may indicate that parental influence has a lot to do with willingness to take on leadership roles.

The GEP group scored the lowest in both the male and female catergories on parental influence (male = 31.32, famale x = 33.52). This may suggest that parents do not have as great an influence on the GEP group, when compared to the other groups. It appears that GEP pupils tend to be more independent and individualistic than their non-GEP peers.

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School Influence

The Express 2 male group (low-achieving group) scored highest on school influence ($x = 38.47$). The female GEP group also scored highly in this area ($x = 38.27$) whilst the male GEP group scored lowest on school influence ($x = 35.00$).

This suggests that there is a difference between the male and female GEP groups, and this could either be attributed to gender or to the school ethos. It is also interesting to note that the female Express 2 group scored relatively high on school influence ($x = 37.45$). This was the same group that scored highly on willingness to lead and parental influence, suggesting that with the females, parental and school influence were important in their decision to take on leadership roles.

Amongst the males, the Express 2 group was the most willing to lead. They scored relatively high on parental influence and the highest in the whole sample on school influence ($x = 38.47$), again suggesting the importance of school influence on willingness to take on leadership roles in the case of pupils from relatively weaker classes in the Express stream.

Differences Between Male and Female Groups

1. Amongst the males, it was the Express 2 group that had the highest potential and the Express 1 group that showed the least potential. However, amongst the females, the Express 1 group registered the highest potential with the Express 2 group registering the least.

2. In the male sample, the Express 2 group with the most potential was also the most willing to lead. In the female sample, the Express 2 group with the least potential was the most willing to lead. However, the similarity lies in the fact that in both the male and female samples, it was the Express 2 (lowest achievement) group who was most willing to lead.

Profile of High Potential Respondents

1) Male (Express 2)

This was the highest potential group and also the most willing to lead amongst the males. However, when compared with the female groups, they scored second highest on willingness to lead.

They also had the highest expectation of national leaders within the male sample, but had lower expectations than the females.

In terms of parental influence, they scored below the famales but second highet amongst the male group. Howver, they score the highest amongst all groups on school influence.

What is interesting to note is that even though they had high potential and were very willing to lead, they had taken on the least responsibility in terms of leadership roles in schools.

This may be a case of "*the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*", or it could be that this group had not come forward to take on leadership roles due to various reasons that could be examined in a separate study.

Leadership roles in schools could also have been assigned to the students with high academic abilities by the teachers, thus reflecting the fact that leadership tasks are more often not assigned to able students who are not academically inclined.

2) Females (Express 1)

The highest potential group amongst the females scored second amongst the female samples in terms of willingness to lead, and second lowest in the combined sample of males and females.

Their expectation of national leaders was second highest in both the female and combined samples.

In terms of parental influence, they scored second highest in the combined sample. However, in terms of school influence, they scored lowest amongst the female sample and third in the combined sample, indicating that school exerts less influences on their lives. However, in terms of leadership roles, they scored second highest in the combined sample.

The GEP Group

Table 5 outlines the mean scores of GEP students and the mean scores of the combined sample of both GEP and Express students

Table 5: Mean Scores of GEP Males, GEP Females and Combined Sample of GEP and Express Students

	GEP Male	GEP Female	Combined Mean
Potential	293.91	304.36	298.37
Willingness to lead	46.02	44.73	46.37
Expectations of National Leaders	39.02	42.36	40.52
Parental Influence	31.32	33.52	33.27
School Influence	35	38.27	33.27

It is interesting to note that the GEP males scored consistently below the combined mean on all factors. However, the GEP females scored above the combined mean scores on all factors except willingness to lead. Herein lies a marked difference between the GEP males and GEP females.

Findings From Correlational Analysis

The various factors were correlated to find out their relationships (see Table 6).

Table 6: Correlation Between Factors (General Sample)

	Potent	Will	Govt	Parent	School	Birth	Lead
Potent	1.00						
Will	0.64 ***	1.00					
Govt	0.44 ***	0.24 ***	1.00				
Parent	0.44 ***	0.33 ***	0.24 **	1.00			
School	0.42 **	0.26 **	0.3 ***	0.32	1.00		
Birth	-0.06	-0.09	-0.06	-0.07	0.11	1.00	
Lead	0.16 *	0.07	0.1	0.08	0.15 *	0.00	1.00

* significant at 0.05 level
** significant at 0.01 level
*** significant at 0.001 level

NB

Potent = Potential
Will = Willingness to lead
Govt = Expectation of National Leaders
Parent = Parental Influence
School = School Influence
Birth = Birth Order
Lead = Leadership Roles to date

Using the general sample, the correlation between potential and willingness was found to be 0.64 ($p \leq 0.0001$). This is high and indicates that those who have greater potential to become furture national leaders are also more willing to take on future political leadership roles.

High correlations were also found between potential and parental influence ($r = 0.44$, $p \leq 0.001$) and between potential and school influence ($r = 0.42$, $p \leq 0.01$).

This indicates that parental and school influence were perceived by respondents to have a fairly important role in the development of leadership potential.

A moderate correlation ($r = 0.38$, $p \leq 0.001$) was found between leadership potential and expectation of national leaders. High potential respondents did not necessarily have very high expectations of their national leaders.

A low correlation of 0.16 ($p \leq 0.05$) was found between potential and present leadership roles taken, indicating that those who have taken on more leadership responsibility may not necessarily be those with high leadership potential. This may be due to the fact that some leadership roles in schools are assigned to the pupils. Those with high leadership potential may also be using their talents in activities outside school.

In terms of willingness to lead, moderate correlations were found for parental influecne ($r = 0.33$, $p \leq 0.001$) and school influence ($r = 0.26$, $p \leq 0.001$). This implies that school and parental influence on respondents' willingness to become national leaders was significant, but only moderately so.

A one-way analysis of variance using varimax rotation was used to ascertain whether differneces exist in the following areas:

a) between males and females on potential
b) between males and females on willingness to take on future political leadership role
c) between the streams on potential
d) between the steams as willingness to take on future political leadership role

No significant differences were found except between males and females on potential. The mean score for potential of males was 293.07 while that of females was 304.78. This indicates a high potential for females in the sample. Since there was no significant difference in the willingness to lead, the significant difference in potential shows that the females were not translating their potential into actions to take on future leadership roles.

No significant differences were found amongst the six groups for potential and willingness.

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Table 7: Result of one-way analysis variances

Variable	Source	DF	F-value	P
Potential	Sex			
	M	1	12.18	0.006
	F			
	Stream			
	GEP			
	Exp 1	2	0.03	0.9726
	Exp 2			
Willingness	Sex			
	M	1	0.48	0.49
	F			
	Stream			
	GEP	2	1.4	0.23
	Exp 1			
	Exp 2			

Another analysis of variance was carried out to examine for significant differences between the six groups (GEP males and females, Express 1 males and females and Express 2 males and females) on measures of leadership and willingness to lead. No significant differences were found.

Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

The findings of the study show that there were no significant differences in willingness to lead when the respondent scores were compared by stream or by sex. This indicates that the GEP students were no different from the Express students in willingness to take on future leadership roles. Neither were males and females different in this aspect.

However, in terms of leadership potential, a significant difference was found to exist between males and females, with females showing a lead over the males. But there was no significant difference between the streams, showing that the GEP students did not have higher leadership potential than their Express stream counterparts.

In the comparison of mean scores, the female respondents scored higher than the males in leadership potential but the males took the lead in the willingness to lead. This supports the theories of various researchers who have examined the phenomenon of underachievement

amongst females, such as Horner's theory of woman's "*fear of success*" (1972). In the Singapore context, there are very few role models for females, especially at the political level, only 2 female MPs and two NMPs. Females in Singapore may also be hesitant to lead because of the multiple roles that they are expected to play as they juggle careers and families, playing the corporate role and then going home to be the good wife and mother.

It is interesting to note that amongst the males, the Express 2 groups (lowest achieving) scored the highest for potential and willingness to leading. Amongst the females the Express 2 group scored the lowest for potential but highest for willingness to lead. This incongruence may indicate that there is a difference in the psychological make-up of males and females. In this case, it shows that females with the least potential may be more eager to please, and thus more willing to serve and take on the leadership roles. Hence the calibre candidates are not the ones most willing to serve.

On the whole, the GEP students scored the lowest for both potential and willingness to lead. This may be explained by Bass (1960) who saw little chances of a person of IQ 160 emerging as a leader unless the average IQ of the groups was 140 instead of 100. Olszewski Kubilius and Kulieke (1988) also indicated that the gifted have a greater desire for self-expression of personal power and influence and may not seek leadership positions.

In fact, it was the lower achieving groups of Express 2 students who scored the highest for both potential and willingness to lead. At the national level, these students could still be considered to be high-achieving as they were from the top premier schools, but were not offered places in the Gifted Education Programme.

The implications from the findings are sobering. The most able are also the most unwilling to lead. If this trend were to continue, there will be a wastage of valuable human resources in Singapore. Intervention is thus needed.

Females in the study had better scores for leadership potential and thus be a valuable source of untapped talent in the Singapore political context. The Express students also indicated greater willingness to lead. Therefore the Express students may be another source of unrealised talent.

Parents and schools were found to have an influence on students' potential and willingness to lead. They should be encouraged to support their able children/students to serve their country through political involvement.

Probably, special attention needs to be given to the development of confidence in potential female leaders. The question that must be answered is: What are the obstacles that stand in the way of women's participation in public and ~~potential~~ political life?

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